Master's competence-based portfolio content as a means of academic writing assessment

Babenko Tamara[1]
Taras Shevchenko National University, Kyiv, Ukraine
E-mail: babenkotamara22@ukr.net
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4288-6404

Higher education in Ukraine is facing new challenges brought about by the reform processes that affect its content and structure. The reduction of contact hours has increased both the volume of students' independent work and their responsibility for academic success. Under these conditions, the portfolio becomes one of the most efficient means of teaching and assessing students' academic performance as it consists of a collection of syllabus-based writing tasks demonstrating the learner's gradual achievements during the course. Portfolios are profitable both for teachers and learners. Thanks to the portfolio, all the students are equally involved into the learning process; they receive more individual attention on the part of the teacher, and to the end of the course, get patterns of several academic papers, such as an essay, abstract, annotative bibliography, and presentation. The portfolios enable the teacher to follow the students' achievements and the process of forming academic writing competences, and if it is necessary, to reinforce their development. Moreover, portfolios provide a perfect tool for valid, multifaceted, and sustainable students' assessment. The system of syllabus-based learning tasks aligned to six categories of Bloom's taxonomy forms the content of the competence-based portfolio. The proposed arrangement of academic writing assignments accounts for successful solving of the course objectives. The introduction of portfolios into the learning process is rather advantageous for other academic courses because most generic and subject-specific competences, formed within the Academic Writing course, are transferable and can be applied to other disciplines. The learners can successfully use the absorbed knowledge of scientific writing for creating academic papers in other courses.
Keywords: *academic writing; academic assessment; generic competences; subject-specific competences; competence-based portfolio.*

Introduction. Assessing students by competences becomes nowadays rather popular for several reasons. Firstly, the epoch of globalization and the process of integration into the European Higher Education Area have dramatically changed University curriculums in Ukraine. One of the transformations has influenced the syllabi by decreasing the number of contact hours and increasing the volume of students' self-study work. Under these conditions, the role of the academic portfolio, as one of the assessment means, significantly grows. Secondly, competence-based students' assessment evaluates the learners' capacity to apply knowledge integrated with sets of skills and abilities for solving their practical learning tasks. The flexibility of the portfolio's content allows its usage for a great variety of purposes.

Analysis of recent research and publications. American teachers P. Elbow and P. Belanoff were the first to start discussing portfolios as a means of teaching and assessing writing skills. Later, P. Belanoff and Dickson M. (1991) summarised their experience in the book "Portfolios: process and product". Since then, portfolios have become a very popular means for teaching and assessing on various education levels, in different disciplines, and for several purposes. Years of practice showed that the strongest advantage of the portfolio is its "collaborative dimension", "which empowers everyone involved" (Elbow, 1996: 30). Besides, portfolios provide "a mechanism for promoting writing across the curriculum (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000: 15).

The researchers recognize the benefits of portfolio usage both for teachers and learners. With the help of portfolios, students get an illustration of "variety and quality of work" they do (Gomez, 1999: 3-8) and thanks to it, they can reinforce the "understanding of writing as a recursive process" " (Romovaa & Andrewb, 2011: 111-122), follow their academic improvement, and self-evaluate the achievements (Ballweg, 2016: 146). For teachers, the portfolio is one of the means for receiving feedback from the students. Being "an organized record" of the learners' academic skills development, portfolios reflect students' gradual advancement over a course (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996: 133). They contain collections of documents, illustrating various works, assigned by the lecturer, along with the students' "reflections on these documents" and their "development over time" (Gomez, 1999: 3-4). Owing to portfolios, the teacher can follow the process of developing academic

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[1] *Ph. D. in Pedagogy, Associate Professor, Head of the Foreign Languages Department of Psychology and Sociology Faculties, Institute of Philology at the Taras Shevchenko National University*

writing competences by "supporting and facilitating individual learning processes" (Ballweg, 2016: 145-146). Moreover, the assessment portfolio contributes to "the teacher's professional development" (Hamp-Lyons, 2006: 140-161).

The multipurposeness of the portfolio has caused the emergence of its variable definitions and characteristics. For instance, Gomez defines the portfolio as "… an organized record of your academic experiences, achievements, and professional development over a period of time" (Gomez, 1999: 3). For Ballweg (2016), it is as well an assessment means used "for supporting and facilitating individual learning" and for "assessing learners' outcomes" (Ballweg, 2016: 145-146). Etheridge (2006) agrees with this point of view and adds that "portfolios provide not only a context for assessment, but a focus on the enhancement of writing skills, namely organizing, presenting, and reflecting on learning" (Etheridge, 2006: 5-6). However, some other researchers point out that we should not underestimate the portfolio by treating it as "a collection" of student's papers used mainly for assessment. They argue that the process of writing and reflective students' work is more important for students' development as it "helps the individual student make sense of herself as a literate person" (Huot & Williamson, 1991: 54; Hamp-Lyons, 2006: 2). One more decisive requirement for the portfolio sets Rea (2011). According to him, the portfolio becomes a sustainable assessment tool if its content coincides with the themes included in the syllabus, providing "a framework for the whole course" so that "the course begins and ends with a portfolio focus" (Rea, 2011: 11). The highlighted features and functions of the portfolios provoke their different titles: "assessment portfolios", "writing portfolios", "syllabus-based portfolios", or mixed, such as "assessment writing portfolios". The last decade brought forth a fresh interest to the portfolio as a teaching tool and a competency-based assessment means in professional degree programs (Kapucu & Koliba, 2017: 993-1006). However, the problem of the Academic Writing competence-based portfolio content and its usage in the function of the assessment object for non-linguistic master students needs further investigations.

The purpose of the article. The paper focuses on the usage of Academic Writing competence-based and syllabus-adjusted portfolio content as an object and multifaceted instrument for assessing non-linguistic master students' achievements. We argue that the portfolio becomes a perfect assessment tool under the condition that the constituent parts of its content align with the six categories of Bloom's taxonomy.

The theoretical backgrounds. The implementation of the competence-based assessment in Higher Education increased the teachers' interest to the portfolio as one of the means, which supplies the learner with syllabus-based tasks for their independent work, and provides the teacher with the information about the student's capacity to solve these tasks, applying their generic and subject-specific competences. Portfolios focus on different competences, skills, and abilities. Villa and Ruiz (2008) define a competence as "good performance in diverse, authentic contexts based on the integration and activation of knowledge, rules, and standards, techniques, procedures, abilities, and skills, attitudes, and values" (Villa & Ruiz, 2008: 28-29). The analyses of University curricula in English-speaking countries revealed that all of them aim at the development of the most valuable for the contemporary world competences. Having analyzed the data received from twenty universities, Villa and Ruiz draw a list of thirteen competences and skills, which noticeably contribute to students' academic achievements, and, at the same time, are highly esteemed by employers (Villa & Ruiz, 2008: 60). It appeared that subject-specific skills, which are in the focus of the Academic Writing course, such as written and oral communications, note taking, essay and report writing, as well as presentation skills top the list of the highly appreciated competences and skills.

The Tuning Methodology, supported by the European Comission, identifies generic (general academic) competences subdivided into instrumental, systemic, and interpersonal, and subject-specific competences, referring to subject areas (González, & Wagenaar, 2005: 28-32; Kennedy, Hyland, & Ryan, 2009: 56-79). The instrumental competences appear to be "crucial to the success" of students' academic work. They help demonstrate the ability to integrate knowledge and recognize "the complexity and dynamics of a situation". These competences permit the "knowledge transfer" and the "analysis of systems"; they are responsible for creating "mental models" and development of "systemic thought", which encourages to "organize and integrate the interrelated components to form a whole" (Villa & Ruiz, 2008: 65-195). In the language teaching and learning practice, instrumental competences involve "knowledge of a second language, ability to analyze, and synthesize", inspire as well the capability for time management, planning, and the capacity to apply knowledge to practice" (Kesler & Ware, 2012: 98).

A student's essay is a kind of undertaking that needs instrumental competences to the full extent. The mental processes, preceding essay writing, integrate generic and subject-specific competences, skills, and abilities, needed to comprehend the theme of an essay. Then, the knowledge transfer capacity ensures the recollection and analysis of the background information from the previous academic courses. After gathering

the appropriate information from scientific sources, the learners analyze, generalize, and synthesize it, applying the competences of systemic thinking (critical reading and thinking).

Systemic competences "involve abilities and skills related to comprehension of an overall system or whole"; they "group into three categories: organisation, enterprise, and leadership" (Villa & Ruiz, 2008: 255). They are characteristic of a creative personality, able to find the unique solution to a problem, to be flexible, and original. Systemic competences are too complicated, and a person needs a lot of time for their formation, but creative academic writing tasks can significantly contribute to their development. If to speak in the terms of the Academic Writing methodology, these competences relate "to the way language works as a system" and embrace sets of subject-specific competences, abilities, and skills (Johnson, 2008: 379).

The ability "to interact well with others" is an integral part of interpersonal generic competences (Villa & Ruiz, 2008: 2001-245). Functioning at individual and social levels, they enhance students' successful academic performance. The Academic Writing Course deals mainly with written communication, but oral communication is involved in the learning process as well. Some of the syllabus' items contain discussions, teamwork, presentations, and question-answer sessions.

Methods. For 16 contact-hour masters' Academic Writing Course at the Faculty of Sociology at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, the master students' competence-based portfolio became an important tool for following and assessing students' success in the discipline. The content analysis of the portfolio shows that it agrees with the Academic Writing syllabus items and consists of six papers, which account for developing one or more subject-specific competences, along with skills and abilities. On the examples of some of them, we show how the portfolio items contribute to the development of competences.

Table 1

Applying Bloom's Taxonomy to Skills Development and Learning Objectives
of Academic Writing Course

Bloom's Taxonomy	Academic writing competences and skills	Specific learning objectives
Remembering	Recollecting, knowledge and skills transference, gathering information, sensing	Researching the topic
Understanding	discriminating, generalizing, summarizing, paraphrasing, citing	Recognizing writing styles, note-taking
Applying	Making determinations, implementing, modelling, developing ideas	Data collection, citations, paraphrases
Analyzing	Comparing, contrasting, differentiating, discriminating, synthesizing, planning, arguing	Outline making, drafting, linking ideas, paragraph writing
Evaluating	Judging, reviewing, criticizing, editing. estimating, self-evaluating	Evaluating and describing results, paragraph editing
Creating	Combining, composing, rearranging	Essay and abstract writing, practicing presentations

In the focus of the portfolio content are essays on the professionally-oriented research topics, such as: "Modernization of Ukraine: current views and opportunities", "Everyday Construction of National Identity", "Domestic violence against women: process and social silence", "The Man Speech and the Woman Speech", "Correlation Between the Elderly Wellbeing and Social Care". The process of essay writing involves several stages, which contribute to solving the learning objectives and development of academic writing competences and skills aligned to Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, et al., 1956). (Table 1).

The first issue in the syllabus deals with the methods and ways of gathering information. To cope with this stage, students need to explore their research competences: to identify suitable sources, find articles on the topic of the research, and, applying different reading techniques, critical reading and thinking, comprehend and analyze the information, which would support their arguments. Note taking is the next stage on the way to essay writing. Students choose a style of taking notes deliberately. Rather often, they do it in the form of a chart, an outline, a spidergram, or a table, as in the example below (Table 2). This time, the topic of the essay is "The Man's Speech and the Woman's Speech".

Table 2

Interactional patterns in same-sex and cross-sex studies providing evidence for the fundamental differences between men and women linguistic behavior

Kunsmann, P. (2013). Gender, Status and Power in Discourse Behavior of Men and Women. *Linguistik Online*, *5*(1). https://doi.org/10.13092/lo.5.1017

Issues	Men	Women
Communication at work	less	More
Purposes	process	result
Interrupting the interlocutor	more	less
Hearing	less	more
Gesture	look away	smile more often, keep eye contact
Stammerings	more	less
Parts of speech	abstract nouns prevail	specific nouns prevail

To elicit the information, which we find in the table, the student had to apply several generic competences, such as critical reading, critical thinking, analysis, evaluation, and summarising. Several sentences and phrases chosen for the direct quotation and paraphrasing as well as references generated according to the APA citation format accomplish the notes.

One more issue, closely connected with note taking, is the annotated bibliography. It serves for developing generic and subject-specific competences, such as discourse and linguistic competences, critical reading, and critical thinking, drafting, structuring, emphasizing, and editing. Here is the example of an annotated bibliography. The topic of the research is "Correlation between the Elderly Wellbeing and Social Care".

L. M. R.García and J. M. R. Navarrro, "The Impact of Quality of Life on the Health of Older People from a Multidimensional Perspective", J*. of Aging Research*, *2018*, pp. 1-7. Doi: 10.1155/2018/4086294.

The authors analyze several parameters of the life quality perception: health, leisure, environmental quality, functional capacity, level of satisfaction, social support, social networks, and positive social interactions. The analyzed parameters provide an effective tool for evaluating life quality of the elderly.

The most significant paper of the course is a six-page essay supplied by the list of references and an abstract. Besides the above-mentioned competences, essay writing embraces planning, drafting, essay and paragraph structuring, summarizing, signposting, editing, and self-evaluating competences. Moreover, the students present their essays to the rest of the group. While preparing the essay for presentation, students have to make slides for visualizing their delivery and to adopt the text of the essay making it suitable for oral presentation. All these preparatory activities account for further development of summarising, time managing, communicative verbal and non-verbal competences, and skills.

Each item of the portfolio has its criterion according to which the lecturer assesses learners' academic achievements. Overall, the master's portfolio accounts for half of the final grade. To the end of the Academic Writing Course, the assessment items look like the embodiment of the academic and subject-specific competences (Table 3).

Findings. The analysis of the master student's Academic Writing portfolio demonstrates that its content represents the syllabus requirements and aligns with Bloom's taxonomy, which provides a gradual development of the generic and subject-specific competences. The variety of fulfilled tasks reveals the learning achievements in each section of the course, ensures the adequate involvement of all the students into the learning process, and witnesses about the learners' persistent work on the key points of the course. The portfolio appears to be one of the most effective and sustainable assessing means because it helps evaluate the students' in-course performance and reveals the competences achieved by them to the end of the Academic Writing Course. The possibility to keep portfolios both in electronic and written forms makes it as well a multifaceted means for evaluating students' distant academic performance.

Table 3

Competences Formation in Academic Writing Course

	Assessment items	Generic (academic) competences	Subject-specific competences and skills
1.	Notes of a scientific article on the topic of the research	Instrumental competences:	Methodological; critical reading, critical thinking, note-taking;

2.	Annotated bibliography to the reference article	metacognitive, cognitive, linguistic	analysis, synthesis, evaluation, summarising
3.	Argumentative or Compare-and-contrast essay (preluded by the abstract)	Systemic competences: sociolinguistic, pragmatic, discourse	Research skills; planning, drafting, structuring, signposting, emphasizing, editing.
4.	Conference abstract		
5.	Presentation (text and slides)	Systemic and interpersonal competences: sociolinguistic, sociocultural, communicative, strategic; mediation and intercultural	Critical thinking, summarising, time managing; transaction and interaction (intercultural and communicative skills); non-verbal communicative skills.
6.	Cover letter	Systemic and interpersonal competences: sociolinguistic, sociocultural, metacognitive	Critical thinking, self- managing, self-monitoring, politeness skills.

Conclusions. The academic writing portfolio is a collection of syllabus-based items that reflects the student's gradual achievements and reveals the process of forming generic and subject-specific competences, which, in their turn, embrace sets of skills integrated with knowledge and demonstrate the learner's capacity to use these competences for solving the learning tasks. The competence-based portfolio is a perfect assessment means as it represents the syllabus specifications and enables the evaluation of learning outcomes. Being backed by the taxonomy of learning objectives, it provides a gradual development of the prearranged competences that equip the teacher with a mechanism of following the learner's advancement in the course. As a result, the final product embodies the implementation of knowledge, skills, and abilities used for solving practical professionally-oriented tasks, which account for the clarity and validity of the learners' assessment. The portfolio usage makes the learning outcomes productive thanks to the equal involvement of all the students in the learning process, the facilitation of their self-study work, promotion of self-evaluation, and fostering the development of competences. Additionally, at the end of the course, the portfolio provides a possibility to view the entire procedure of creating an academic piece of writing: starting with gathering the information by reading scientific literature in the field up to creating an essay on the topic. Moreover, the portfolio can function as a model for further academic achievements within the other academic courses. The usage of portfolios is beneficial for distant learning, either intended or happening as a result of some unpredicted factors, such as the coronavirus pandemic. However, the problem of evaluation and self-evaluation of master students' portfolios needs further researches.

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Зміст портфоліо з академічного письма як засіб оцінювання результатів навчання студентів-магістрів

Бабенко Тамара[2]
Київський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка, Київ, Україна

Під впливом процесів реформування, вища освіта в Україні опинилася перед новими викликами, які суттєво відбилися на її змісті та структурі. Проте зменшення аудиторних годин та збільшення годин самостійної роботи позитивно вплинуло на індивідуалізацію навчального процесу та усвідомлення студентами відповідальності за свої академічні успіхі. За таких умов, зростає увага до використання портфоліо як однієї із самих ефективних форм організації самостійної роботи студента та засобу контролю й оцінювання навчальної діяльності з англомовної дисципліни «Академічне письмо». Зміст портфоліо складається із завдань, що відображені у робочій навчальній програмі курсу, й ця властивість робить його ефективним засобом оцінювання якості навчальної діяльності студента. Використання портфоліо має переваги для студента й викладача, адже, всі студенти пропорційно задіяні у навчальному процесі, отримують індивідуальну увагу викладача й, по завершенні курсу, мають зразки кількох академічних робіт: есе, (авторського) резюме, анотованої бібліографії, презентації тощо. Застосування портфоліо дозволяє викладачеві стежити протягом семестру за навчальними успіхами кожного студента й, за необхідності, допомагати йому, а у кінці курсу – об'єктивно оцінювати навчальні досягнення кожного. Система компетентністно-орієнтованих навчальних завдань, побудованих у відповідності до шістьох категорій таксономії Блума, створюють зміст портфоліо та сприяють успішному вирішенню завдань курсу.

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[2] *кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент, завідувач кафедри іноземних мов факультетів психології та соціології Інституту філології Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка*

Застосування портфоліо позитивно впливає й на загальну академічну успішність студентів, адже більшість академічних (загальнопредметних) та специфічних (предметних) компетентностей, що формуються у процесі навчання, можуть бути успішно застосовані й до інших академічних дисциплін.

Ключові слова: *академічне письмо, (нелінгвістичні) студенти магістратури, оцінювання академічної успішності, академічні компетентності, предметно-специфічні компетентності, компетентністно-орієнтоване портфоліо.*